

Dear Bureau of Land Management:

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This letter is in response to the BLM's solicitation of public input regarding its proposed planning options for the Northeast National Petroleum Reserve. After reading about and hearing testimony on the three different proposed plans, I strongly support plan "A", the "leave things as they are" plan. Plans B and C will allow the destruction by the oil industry of too much critical wildlife habitat.

Let me make a few more detailed points:

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1. The oil industry will make the argument (as they did at the Anchorage presentation on June 28, 2004) that national energy security is at stake and thus the US needs to drill wherever economically viable oil can be recovered. The national energy security argument is ridiculous, and everyone who has looked into this argument knows that. There is no way the US can drill its way to energy independence as long as we depend so heavily on oil. Energy conservation and alternative energy can play a much greater role in energy security than even the most aggressive drilling strategy.

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2. Plan A is not great, but it is better than B or C. The BLM has correctly identified areas where plan A offers insufficient protection to certain rivers and where the damage potentially caused by ice roads is not properly thought out. Plan A should be strengthened by the new information and the performance-based measures now available to the BLM.

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3. The oil industry has a horrible environmental record. If the oil industry instead had a good record, there would not be so much concerned opposing testimony from those of us who care about the health of our environment. The oil industry claims that they now have better technology for cleaner drilling. The burden of proof sits with them. This industry has hundreds of surface and air pollution violations per year, many of which unfortunately go undocumented because of an insufficient number of EPA inspectors. Nonetheless, these violations occur and have occurred for years. The oil industry must prove good stewardship, and prove it over a sustained period, before they have access to any fragile or critical habitat.

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4. The current pace of oil and mineral extraction around the world is unsustainable and grossly destructive. At the same time, new technology (e.g., solar and wind) and increased efficiency mean that humans are close to a more sustainable relationship with the Earth. With the population stabilizing in the US and other developed countries, this means that the extractive industries are near the end of their destructive lifetimes. What we can save from environmental destruction over the next 20 to 30 years we will likely save for all time. What we lose now is lost forever. We therefore need to be particularly sensitive to which habitats we put at risk during the last decades of humanity's gross resource extraction.

5. The comment period is too short. Given the detailed proposals put forward by BLM, and given that summer is a more difficult time to get the attention and time of Alaskans, more time should be available for thoughtful analysis. I suggest 90 days.

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Let me finish by saying that I have a personal interest in Alaska and its environment as well as expertise in the ill effects of oil development. I grew up in Alaska and attended K-12 in Anchorage. Currently I reside in Alaska part of the year. I am also a Ph.D. scientist capable of analyzing complicated material and recognizing solid science. My primary expertise is in Astronomy and Astrobiology. I have secondary expertise in global warming and pollution, and thereby recognize the grave danger of oil development in the fragile habitats on the coastal plain in the Northeast National Petroleum Reserve. Sufficient land has already been made available to the oil industry, and the 1998 study clearly and wisely set aside the most fragile and biologically important habitat. This area needs to be protected, which is currently possible only under option "A".

Thank you for making sure the public is part of this process.

Sincerely,

Ted von Hippel, Ph.D.
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